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Letter dated 29 July 2016 from the Permanent Representatives of Spain and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Spain and the United Kingdom, as co-chairs of the Security Council Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security, have the honour to transmit herewith a summary note of the meeting held on 29 February 2016 on the situation of women, peace and security in Mali (see annex).

We should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Román **Oyarzun**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Spain to the United Nations

(*Signed*) Matthew **Rycroft**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations

16-13702 (E) 090816

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Security Council Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security

Summary of meeting on Mali, 29 February 2016

On 29 February, the Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security was briefed by the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), Koen Davidse, and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) country representative in Mali, accompanied by the heads of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the United Nations Children's Fund and senior mission staff working in the areas of gender affairs, women's protection, stabilization, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, civil affairs and political affairs.

The political situation in Mali at the time of the meeting was characterized by limited progress in the implementation of the peace agreement and delays in the implementation of key provisions.

The Deputy Special Representative provided the context of the situation for women and girls in Mali, where the rate of female genital mutilation is nearly 90 per cent and the rate of child marriage is over 50 per cent. In the World Bank list of fragile countries, Mali ranks 50 of 52. The Deputy Special Representative noted that women's participation in the peace negotiations had been extremely low and there was only one woman currently sitting on the committees set up to implement the peace agreement (including on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and security sector reform). He highlighted the need for capacity-building programmes to increase the meaningful participation of women. As for the mission's own gender composition, the troop- and police-contributing countries are performing poorly with regard to deploying women to MINUSMA, and MINUSMA is looking at improving the gender balance among national civilian staff.

The UN-Women country representative in Mali shared research on female relatives' influence on combatants with regard to stopping the fighting, laying down arms and reintegrating back into communities. Malian women from civil society have mobilized extensively, built coalitions and articulated their specific demands, including: a 30 per cent quota (announced by the government last November) in relation to all national institutions and the launch in January 2016 of Mali's second national action plan on women, peace and security supported by UN-Women and MINUSMA, 15 per cent earmarked funding and 10 per cent of profits from the exploitation of natural resources. The disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process being planned risks overlooking women associated with the armed groups. Messages against gender equality in social media are being used to radicalize and recruit young people in the north, and jihadists are winning the communications battle against women's rights, in both urban and rural spaces.

A representative of UN-Women in New York, as secretariat of the Informal Expert Group, provided a list of recommendations related to furthering the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda in Mali, through MINUSMA, the Government and the Security Council, particularly in the light of the Council mission to Mali, the mission's strategic review and its mandate renewal.

In response to questions from Security Council members, United Nations participants in New York and Bamako added the following points:

- On the mission: MINUSMA is recruiting a senior gender adviser, a post currently occupied by a Member State secondment, which will move to the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General soon, and there is a gender task force of focal points in all substantive units and a working group on monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements for conflict-related sexual violence. All mission staff have received mandatory training on gender and peace operations, since July, and there are separate trainings for the military contingents and specific trainings on conflict-related sexual violence. The mission is awaiting guidance from Headquarters on consolidation of human rights functions, including women's protection. The responsibility for implementing gender equality obligations lies with the Special Representative and the whole mission, not just the gender adviser, and senior leadership must take into account the accountability indicators on women, peace and security proposed by the peace and security reviews.

- On protection issues and conflict-related sexual violence: Although the United Nations has established mechanisms to enhance the collection, verification, documentation and analysis of information on conflict-related sexual violence, the lack of access owing to increased insecurity constitutes a major impediment to documenting cases of conflict-related sexual violence. Progress against impunity is very slow, including with regard to the specific cases of conflict-related sexual violence filed with the authorities in 2014 and 2015. Civil society organizations registered the complaint that the first trial against a Malian defendant is focused on destruction of historical monuments, but it should have also included forced marriage. There can be no amnesty for conflict-related sexual violence, and it must be monitored as potential breaches of the ceasefire and taken into account in security arrangements, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and transitional justice. Four Malian parties are listed in the annexes to the report of the Secretary-General, and three of them have been listed by the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities. The Deputy Special Representative underlined the need to reinforce this sanctions committee. Violations of women's rights in cities with a major presence of terrorist groups were highlighted. There are acute shortfalls in services for survivors, and survivors need to receive reparations and livelihood support as part of post-conflict recovery.

- Humanitarian situation: MINUSMA underlined that only 4 per cent of humanitarian projects have women and girls as the principal beneficiaries. A lack of adequate financial resources was mentioned on several occasions by the Deputy Special Representative.

- On disarmament, demobilization and reintegration: Existing policy and guidelines on gender and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, including good practices from other contexts, must be applied. The mission is waiting for an inclusive composition on the lists provided by parties. Three cantonment sites have been approved for construction, and the camp layouts are gender-responsive.

- On goals for the next 6-12 months: The Deputy Special Representative suggested focusing on one external goal, women's representation in post-agreement committees, and one internal goal, gender balance in the mission, starting with national staff in particular. As noted by the head of OCHA in Mali, in negotiations in Ouagadougou and Algiers, there also were very few women among international organizations, and the international community should be a role model in that regard. There is a need for a coordination strategy among the mission, the United Nations country team and other international actors, such as the European Union military mission to contribute to the training of the Malian armed forces, for the capacity-building of Malian security forces on gender-related aspects.

The co-chairs ended the meeting with a reminder of the collective effort needed to make progress in these areas. They highlighted the importance of communicating increased information on the implementation of women, peace and security agenda in Mali to the Security Council through the regular briefings and reporting, as called for in Security Council resolutions 2122 (2013) and 2242 (2015). Mali would be back on the agenda of the Informal Expert Group in the second half of 2016.